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THE ANNEXATION OF TEXAS AND THE MEXICAN
WAR.

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It is probable that no period in the history of the United States, with the possible exception of that embracing the Civil War and its immediate causes, has monopolized so large a share of the attention of history writers and others as the period between 1840 and 1850, the leading events of which were the annexation of Texas and the Mexican War. The men and events of no period have been more persistently maligned and more recklessly distorted. The poison that permeates the larger histories carries unmistakable evidences of the ignorance and prejudice that darkened the minds of the authors. The smaller histories, and especially school histories, which for the most part are compiled from the material furnished by the larger histories, have, unintentionally, no doubt, as a rule, selected out many fragments that are real Trojan horses, and baleful in making impressions upon the minds of the young. I have recently examined two Southern school histories, which bear many evidences of having been dressed up to suit the sectional sentiment supposed to predominate in the South, with several doses of this poison extracted along with other matter.

The very strained and elaborate efforts made in the political campaign of 1844 to blacken the reputation of the Texas pioneer and his work as a nation builder, as well as the libelous defamation of statesmen and citizens of the United States, who actively, yet legitimately and honorably, aided in so great a consummation as the annexation of Texas, it would seem ought to have been consigned to the museum of the history of partisanship in this country, but such is not the case. The newspaper, the pamphlet, the speech, the sermon, the vituperation, the billingsgate that appealed to the baser passions of men from 1840 to 1850, have been exalted to the plane of history, and such men as Jackson, Calhoun, Houston, Polk and other illustrious statesmen are gathered in a group with the Texas pioneer, and they are summed up as swindlers, robbers, liars, thieves, cowards, adventurers, slavocrats, "foul mouthed

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tobacco-spouting Indian killers, demagogues and politicians hunting around to steal a slice of land suitable for slave labor."¹ This forceful, if not elegant, characterization is expurgated before it reaches the school room.

The main end at which all the labor of this class of historians is aimed is to show, in the first place, that the annexation of Texas to the United States was the culmination of a deliberate scheme to enlarge the area of slavery, and was therefore a measure purely in the interests of the slaveholder. To establish this they hold up the Texas pioneer as a mere instrument in the hands of the slaveholder to make Texas a slave colony, and say that when Texas became large enough to make a respectable show of a rebellion, the revolution against Mexico was precipitated, the slaveholder furnishing the men and means requisite to the success of that revolution. And the effort has been to show, in the second place, that the immediate cause of the war in 1846 was the unwarranted and unprovoked invasion of Mexican territory, which forced Mexico, in self-defense, to attack United States forces and thus become technically responsible for that war.²

A very wide range of facts is drawn upon to establish these propositions—facts selected out from a great mass and grouped so as to give plausibility to their theories. To reply in detail to these would consume more than two entire issues of THE QUARTERLY. In lieu thereof some general facts will be given, which will serve, in the main, as an answer to the whole.

As the annexation of Texas and its logical sequence, the acqui-

¹Bancroft's *Hist. of Mex.*, Vol. V., p. 307; Von Holst's *Const. and Pol. Hist. U. S.*, Vol. II, p. 512 *et seq.*

"The spirit of the partisan is nowhere more manifest than in the following: "The Texan army under Houston amounted to only eight hundred men [at San Jacinto] of whom it is said not more than fifty were citizens of Texas." Von Holst's *Constitutional Hist. U. S.*, Vol. II, p. 570. In support of this statement, Wise, of Virginia, is quoted in a foot note as saying "It was they [the people of the great valley of the Mississippi] that conquered Santa Anna at San Jacinto, and three-fourths of them after winning that glorious field had peaceably returned to their homes." To this is added, by Von Holst, "*in the United States.*" It is susceptible of almost positive proof that ninety-eight per cent. of those who fought at San Jacinto were already settled in Texas or remained in the Republic after the Revolution.

sition of territory to the Pacific, was the second great step in the history of territorial expansion, a glance at the history of expansion in general in the United States will afford some light upon the attitude assumed in some sections against the measure.

Sectional jealousy is coeval with the history of the country. In the original formation of the Union it manifested itself in various ways. The purchase of Louisiana in 1803, however, was the culmination, in the eyes of New England, of a series of outrages in that section which justified extreme measures. To meet the argument that the larger part of the acquisition would be in the northern section of the Union, they said, "This will be formed into new States, and the South will use them to govern the East, until growing in numbers themselves, will combine to rule both the South and East. Under either set of rulers, New England is doomed." Public meetings were held, resolutions adopted, and memorials prepared looking to the formation of a northern confederacy. New York was to be secured by the influence of Aaron Burr, who, as part of the scheme, became a candidate for governor of his State. His defeat, to take the lead in a similar scheme a year or two later, together with discouragements from the great mass of conservative citizens, put an end to the first effort at secession. The agitation, however, led to the preparation of a constitutional amendment restricting congressional representation of the Southern States to the actual number of the free white population. The proposition to submit it to the people passed the lower house by the aid of Southern votes, but failed to pass the Senate.¹

The fight on the Louisiana question, however, did not stop at this point. Every obstacle that partisan genius could invent was put in the way of establishing a territorial government over Louisiana. The same constitutional questions were raised by the Federalists of that day as are now raised by Democrats over our recent acquisitions, and the same answers made by the strict constructionists of that day as are now made by the loose constructionists.

Overcome at this point, the next opposition was to the admission of Louisiana as a State. Josiah Quincy, then representing Massachusetts in the United States Senate, and the leader of the opposition, again raised the secession flag, but the disadvantages of a

¹McMaster's *Hist. People U. S.*, Vol. III, p. 45 *et seq.*, and authorities.

minority and the overshadowing importance of the war with England soon relegated this opposition to the rear.⁴

In the negotiations which led to the treaty of 1819, although John Quincy Adams was the especial champion of the claim of the United States to Texas, New England opposition to the acquisition of Florida was so extreme that President Monroe and the slaveholding members of his cabinet, as a concession to New England feeling, forced Mr. Adams to give up, not only Texas, but over 60,000 square miles of what was confessedly a part of the Louisiana purchase, and therefore a part of United States territory, so that more area was lost than gained by the Florida purchase and treaty of 1819, irrespective of any claim which the United States had to Texas proper.²

Coming on down to the annexation of Texas, opposition arose from the same source, with John Quincy Adams, the former expansionist, in the lead. No invective was too strong, no vituperation too bitter, and no constitutional construction too strained for his opposition to the measure. Finding that the former efforts at secession were fruitless, Massachusetts now adopted the plan of South Carolina, and by legislative action solemnly nullified the acts of Congress, and unless recently repealed this nullification still stands as part of the law of Massachusetts.³

The present attitude of Ex-Governor Boutwell, Senator Hoar, and Edward Atkinson upon the matter of expansion is therefore historically and geographically consistent.

To determine the question as to whether the early movements made towards the peopling of Texas were due to the inspiration of the slave holder, we need only note one or two or the formative influences of that period.

Moses Austin, in whose mind the colonization of Texas originated, was a Connecticut man, born and educated in that State. He came to Virginia and remained several years, but never engaged in planting. In his mining operations he imported English laborers. Just before the expiration of President Washington's last

¹McMaster's *Hist. People U. S.*, *loc. cit.*

²Benton's *Thirty Years' View*, I, 15 *et seq.*

³Von Holst, Vol. II, p. 117.

term, he left Virginia and went to Missouri, and there engaged first in mining, then in banking. When Missouri reached the necessary stage of development to entitle her to admission as a State into the Union, Austin, true to the instincts of the pioneer, left and came to Texas. His son, Stephen F. Austin, who succeeded him in his colonizing enterprise, was, like many Southern men of that day, an avowed opponent of the institution of slavery. The promulgation of the Monroe doctrine in 1823 was a virtual guaranty of the autonomy of Mexico, and the relations between that country and the United States at that time were of the friendliest character. Many individual citizens of the United States had aided Mexico in her revolution, and the Monroe doctrine was an especial sign of the friendship of the Northern republic. The result was the enactment of liberal colonization laws in terms inviting population to her borders. In response to this, besides Austin, a number of empresarios entered into contracts to bring in settlers. Of these, Robertson, DeWitt, Edwards, Milam, Thorn, and Chambers were from the slave holding States, and Burnet and Vehlein from the non-slave holding States; De Leon, Dominguez, Zavala, Filisola, and Padilla were Mexicans; Purnell, Drake, Exeter, Wilson, S. J. Wilson, and Beales were Englishmen; Cameron a Scotchman; and Powers, McMullen, and McGloin, Irishmen. The only empresarios who actually introduced permanent settlers into the State, besides Austin, were Robertson, De Witt, De Leon, Powers, and McMullen and McGloin. Those introduced into the colonies of the three first named constituted ninety per cent. of the population in 1835. Austin was a pioneer by inheritance and education. Robertson, though a native of North Carolina, was carried when a child to Tennessee by his father, who was the brother and partner of Gen. James Robertson, the founder of Nashville. De Witt was a native Kentuckian, but like Moses Austin, went to Missouri at an early day, and was a conspicuous factor in its development from a wilderness to a State. Austin's colonists were from all parts of the United States and the principal countries of Europe. As many as sixty families came to his colony at one time from the State of New York. The colonists of Robertson and De Witt were principally from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri. As a rule, they were a race of pioneers, the boldest and most successful that had ever reclaimed any part of the great area of the United States. The

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pioneers of the North who crossed the Alleghanies were not able to cope with the savage in Ohio until Mad Anthony Wayne planted the flag in advance of the outermost settlements. As he pushed on to Indiana and Michigan, Wm. Henry Harrison performed the same service, and later on, Zachary Taylor cleared the wilderness of Illinois and Wisconsin. In the Southeast the same policy had to be pursued by the government of the United States in driving back the Seminoles, Creeks, and others, but the westward stream that started out from Virginia and the Carolinas crossed the Alleghanies and unaided drove out the savages, reclaimed the fertile territory of Kentucky and Tennessee, demanded an outlet through the Mississippi, spurred Mr. Jefferson to purchase Louisiana, crossed the Mississippi, settled Missouri and Arkansas and started them on their career as States in the Union, and from 1822 to 1836 struggled and fought in Texas against the greatest odds of any pioneer population in the history of the country.

This was the predominant element that gradually coalesced with kindred spirits from all climes and laid the political foundations of Texas. In the organization of the first government, David G. Burnet, a New Jersey man, was president, and Lorenzo De Zavala, of Mexico, vice-president. Maine gave Ebenezer Allen, the second attorney general, and Timothy Pilsbury, one of the first representatives both in the Texas and the United States Congress. From New Hampshire came Joshua Fletcher, first treasurer of the provisional government; from Vermont, Ira Ingram, first speaker of the Texas Congress, and Royal T. Wheeler, one of the first justices of the supreme court; from Massachusetts, Anson Jones, third president, and Asa Brigham, first treasurer of the Republic; from Connecticut, besides the Austins, Eliphalet M. Pease, comptroller, member of the legislature and governor, and Ashbel Smith, minister to Great Britain and France; from New York, Gail Borden, member of the Consultation, Jno. P. Borden, first commissioner of the general land office, Thomas H. Borden and Francis A. Moore, editors and proprietors of the quasi official newspaper of the Republic, Louis P. Cook, second secretary of the navy, Erastus Smith, Thos. J. Pilgrim, and others conspicuous in the various walks of life; from Pennsylvania, S. Rhoads Fisher, first secretary of the navy, David S. Kaufman, several times speaker of the lower house of Congress and one of the first two members for

Texas in the United States Congress; from Ohio, Governor Robinson and General Sydney Sherman; from Indiana, John Rice Jones, postmaster general; from Illinois, M. B. Menard; while from Great Britain and Germany there were Cameron, Ward, Linn, Erath, and numerous others prominent both in civil and military affairs.

The leading Mexicans in Texas were also in full sympathy with the revolution, Navarro and Seguin being among the most prominent. The latter commanded a company at San Jacinto which responded with enthusiasm to the battle cry "Remember the Alamo."

The constitution of the Republic of Texas is a model of its kind, and it is said that Daniel Webster characterized it as having no superior, and no equal save the constitution of the United States. Imprisonment for debt was abolished fifteen years in advance of any legislation by the United States Congress in that direction. A homestead law was enacted, which has been the model for all the States of the Union to pattern after. In property rights the wife was made equal with the husband, and many other laws may be cited as showing advanced and enlightened statesmanship.

The first efforts of the people in 1832 and 1833 to secure separate statehood have been grossly misrepresented.¹ The political machinery of the dual State of Coahuila and Texas was wholly unsuited to a republican form of government. So late as 1834, there were but two representatives in the congress of that State from Texas, pretending to represent a population scattered over 200,000 square miles of area, and widely diverse in race, education, and political traditions. There were Mexicans at Nacogdoches, San Antonio, and Goliad; Irish at Refugio and San Patricio; and Americans in the central, southern, and eastern portions of what

¹Von Holst (Vol. II, p. 562), giving J. Q. Adams as his authority, after saying that "the next aim of the conspirators was the separation of Coahuila and constituting Texas a separate State," said that the design of the colonists "to declare their independence in a convention on the 1st of April, 1833," was known to Jackson. The facts were that the convention of 1832 adjourned with the understanding that another would be held in 1833, not to declare independence from Mexico, but to secure a separate existence as a Mexican State. This was well known both in the United States and Texas, and not a secret understanding between Jackson and the so-called Texas conspirators, as Mr. Adams tried to show.

is now the State, pursuing different occupations and having different wants, all with a capital over a thousand miles distant, with no railroad nor telegraph, nor even well defined roads, having department chiefs with undefined powers, legislative, executive, and judicial, and a suffrage system so hampered as to render it useless, no laws being published and distributed among the masses. These were but a few of the many insuperable obstacles to the maintenance of a republican government in the dual State of Coahuila and Texas.

The revolution which began in Texas in 1835 owed its existence to causes not confined to Texas. The movement was quite general throughout Mexico, but in those States nearest to the national capital the presence of an organized military force under the direction of Santa Anna rendered actual resistance useless. Zacatecas made a bold stand, but her defeat was so crushing as to put the whole population of Mexico at the feet of the usurper. Coahuila was in a state of anarchy, and under the power of one of Santa Anna's generals, and it remained for Texans either to abandon their homes and fly across the Sabine, or to remain and resist. They did the latter, not as a separate and independent sovereignty, but as a State under the Mexican flag. The heroes of the Alamo perished fighting under that flag, and while the declaration of independence was being adopted in convention at Old Washington Santa Anna was held in check at San Antonio by Travis and his men. These aspects of the Texas revolution seem to have been ignored by so careful a historian as Woodrow Wilson.

Two attempts had been made by John Quincy Adams, and one in the early part of General Jackson's administration, to purchase Texas from Mexico, neither of which was inspired by the residents of Texas.

After the battle of San Jacinto the policy of annexation was generally favored in Texas, but the overtures of Texas met with no favorable response in the United States. As Texas grew in population and wealth the annexation sentiment grew in the United States, but it took no practical shape until after Mexico made two feeble and ineffectual attempts to invade Texas in 1842. A successful defense of her territory against all attempts at reconquest, and the maintenance of a well organized civil government from 1836 on in the minds of many justified a recognition of her status

as an independent sovereignty. The United States and the leading countries of Europe had treated her as such, and in 1843 an annexation treaty was proposed, which was vehemently opposed by New England, with John Quincy Adams in the lead. The United States was officially notified by Mexico that such a step would be regarded as a cause for war.¹ This threat afforded the Whigs an excuse for opposing annexation, and that party as a mass resisted the measure. The result was that when it was submitted to Congress, in 1844, it was defeated by a decisive vote. From this action of Congress the friends of annexation appealed to the people, and the issue of annexation overshadowed all others in that notable campaign which resulted in the election of Mr. Polk to the presidency. An analysis of that vote, by States, will show that it was neither a Northern nor Southern nor a slaveholder's movement. The non-slaveholding States of Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan, with an aggregate white population of 6,201,991 (census of 1840), voted for it, while the non-slaveholding States of Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Ohio, with an aggregate white population of 3,281,401, voted against it. The slaveholding States of Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri, with an aggregate white population of 2,489,358, voted for it, while the slaveholding States of Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky, with an aggregate white population of 2,092,515, voted against it. This result, too, was in spite of the fact that Henry Clay, than whom no statesman in the history of the United States ever had a larger personal following, was at the head of the opposition. The campaign literature of that day shows that the main argument used throughout the United States, outside of New England, against annexation, was that the annexation of Texas would necessarily result in Mexico's waging war. This is significant in considering further on which nation was responsible for the Mexican war.

In view of this sentiment in the United States, another treaty was prepared late in 1844. When news of this reached the ears of

¹The Mexican government had repeatedly, without any sort of qualification, signified to the United States that it would consider the annexation of Texas as a declaration of war. Von Holst, Vol. II, p. 80.

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the Mexican minister at Washington, he promptly notified the authorities that "Should the United States commit the unheard of attempt (*inaudite atentado*) of appropriating to themselves a portion of Mexican territory he would demand his passport and his country would declare war."¹ In other words, if Texas was annexed, or attempted to be annexed to the United States, Mexico would declare war. The resolution to annex Texas did pass both houses of Congress, and the minister as promptly demanded his passports and left the country. It is well to note at this juncture that the United States was the first country to recognize the independence of Mexico as a republic, and to establish diplomatic relations with her; and that Spain did not acknowledge the independence of Mexico until sixteen years after independence was actually won, but chose to regard her as a revolting province. This was the attitude of Spain and Mexico when San Jacinto was fought. Following the example of her mother country, Mexico refused to acknowledge Texas independence and chose to regard her as a revolting province; hence Almonte's reference to it as a part of the territory of Mexico. In the mean time, however, Mexico had solemnly covenanted that she would, and she actually did, recognize the independence of Texas, upon condition that Texas would annex herself to no other country, and gave Great Britain and France as security for the permanent autonomy of Texas.

In view of the threatening aspect of affairs, President Polk (called by H. H. Bancroft, Von Holst, and that numerous class of historians, "Polk the Mendacious") referred in his message of December 2, 1845, to the situation in the following clear and succinct statement: "Texas has declared her independence and maintained it by her arms for more than nine years. She has had an organized government in successful operation during that period. Her separate existence as an independent state has been recognized by the United States and the principal powers of Europe. Treaties of commerce and navigation had been concluded by different nations, and it had become manifest to the whole world that any further attempt on the part of Mexico to conquer her, or overthrow her government, would be vain. Even Mexico herself had become

¹Bancroft's *Hist. of Mexico*, Vol. V, p. 342 *et seq.*; Von Holst, Vol. II, p. 80 *et seq.*; Niles Register, Vol. LXVIII, pp. 134 and 305, and authorities.

satisfied of this fact, and while the question of annexation was pending before the people of Texas, the government of Mexico, by a formal act, agreed to recognize the independence of Texas on condition that she would not annex herself to any other power. The agreement to acknowledge the independence of Texas, with or without this condition, is conclusive against Mexico. The independence of Texas is a fact, conceded by Mexico herself, and she has no right or authority to prescribe restrictions on the form of government which Texas might afterwards choose to assume."

New England was now ablaze with excitement. The legislature of Massachusetts solemnly nullified the annexation resolutions, as before stated, and every form of opposition, except open rebellion, was manifested throughout that region, and others that caught the contagion.

The Mexican minister left Washington on the 7th of March, four days after the approval of the resolutions by President Tyler. When the news reached Mexico, that country was excited from center to circumference. On the 29th of the same month their Congress decreed a large loan to meet the expenses of what they termed "the impending war." The condition of affairs was officially announced to the nation, and the people were summoned to arms in defence of their rights and honor. On the 4th of June the President issued his proclamation, stating that Mexico would oppose annexation with all the strength at her command, and would put into the field the whole strength of the army. On the 12th of July Condé, the war minister, issued a circular letter announcing that the government had decided on a declaration of war, and on the 16th he ordered the filling up of contingents of troops "for the war which she wages against the United States."

In the meantime Texas was arranging her part of the annexation. A special session of her Congress was called to meet June 16th, and on the 23rd it accepted the terms and called a convention of the people to meet July 4th, ratify annexation, and to frame a constitution. This was done with but one dissenting voice. The United States had not yet sent a soldier west of the Sabine, but in view of the threats of Mexico, the commands then on the western border of Louisiana, where they had been stationed since 1819, were filled out so as to reach 1500 men.

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On the 20th of July the supreme government of Mexico decided, with the unanimous consent of the council, that "From the moment when the supreme government shall know that the development of Texas has annexed to the American Union or that troops from the Union have invaded it, it shall declare the nation at war with the United States."¹

On the 12th of August, Gen. Taylor's troops arrived at Corpus Christi.

Notwithstanding the war-like movements in Mexico in March, April, May, June, and July, the United States learned that Herrera, who was installed as president on the 16th of September, was willing to negotiate with a view of settling all matters in dispute. Accordingly, Consul Black was sent to him to ascertain whether Mexico would receive an envoy empowered to settle all matters in dispute between the two countries. Herrera was in the embarrassing position of being in favor of negotiating a peace, yet at the head of a government whose people were clamoring for war and denouncing as perfidy and treason all attempts to negotiate a peace.² As was natural in such a situation he answered evasively to the effect that Mexico would receive a "*commissioner* authorized to settle the *present dispute* in a peaceable, honorable and just manner," whereupon President Polk sent John Slidell, who arrived at Mexico City on the 8th of December.

In the meantime the divisions of Paredes, Gaona, and Arista had been sent to the Rio Grande, or, as the Mexicans said, "to the front." Paredes had proceeded on his way as far as San Luis Potosí, where he learned of the contemplated negotiations. He stopped his division and issued a *pronunciamiento* announcing that he would reorganize the government on a military basis, and was on his way back to Mexico when Slidell arrived. Under such circumstances Slidell presented his credentials as envoy extraordinary; but the government refused to receive him, on the ground that he had not come as a commissioner to settle the present matter in dispute, but as an envoy authorized to settle all disputes. He remained in Mexico until Paredes arrived. On the 16th of Decem-

¹Von Holst, Vol. I, p. 80 *et seq.*

²Bancroft, *Hist. Mex.*, Vol. V, p. 280 *et seq.*

ber Paredes deposed Herrera, and after some ineffectual attempts at negotiation, Slidell returned to the United States.¹

Advised of these events General Taylor was adding to his forces at Corpus Christi, and getting things ready to resist the threatened invasion of Texas. In October the people of Texas ratified the new State Constitution, and the terms of annexation. In December Congress passed the act extending the United States laws over Texas, and on the 19th of February following the last formal act was performed which made Texas a State of the Union. Negotiations were at an end, and on the 12th of March General Taylor broke camp and started his army for the Rio Grande. This was the line chosen by Mexico as her front, rather than the Nueces. In his instructions to General Taylor, the President took the extra precaution to order him to act strictly on the defensive, and if he should find any occupied garrisons on the left branch of the Rio Grande to take all needful precautions against a hostile collision. He arrived opposite Matamoras in April, and immediately dispatched General Worth across the river with a courteous note addressed to the Mexican commander at Matamoras expressing the desire that the two armies maintain peaceable relations pending the settlement, by their respective civil authorities, of all matters in controversy between the two governments. The only reply to this was a curt note to the effect that his movements were considered as acts of war.

On the 12th of April, General Ampudia sent him a note peremptorily ordering him to move back across the Nueces, under penalty of immediate hostilities.²

On the 26th of April a squadron of cavalry was ambushed and captured by some Mexican troops that had crossed the river, and with this and the siege of Fort Brown and the battle of Palo Alto on the 8th of May, the Mexican war was launched, the war which the historians before mentioned are handing down to us as the war of "Polk the Mendacious."

According to the Mexican, New England, and whig theory, the boundary between the United States and Mexico was the Sabine, and therefore, the moment a United States soldier crossed the

¹Bancroft, *Hist. Mex.*, *loc. cit.*

²Ibid.

Sabine, Mexican territory was invaded, and the United States would be the aggressor. Santa Anna's announced purpose when he took charge was to drive the Gringos across the Sabine, but in actual practice the Rio Grande was, and for ten years previously had been, the extreme outpost of Mexico.

There never had been any dispute between Texas and Mexico as to a boundary line between them. Such a dispute would have been on the same plane as a dispute between Virginia and the United States as to whether the Potomac or Rappahannock was the boundary between that State and the United States. The recognition of such a dispute by Mexico would have been tantamount to an acknowledgment of the fact that Texas was sovereign, and therefore separate from Mexico, a concession of the only point at issue between Mexico and Texas.

The idea, so often expressed, especially in our school histories, that the Mexican war was occasioned by a dispute over the territory between the Nueces and Rio Grande was a political afterbirth, having only a very remote connection, if any at all, with the real cause of that war. It was a partisan invention of the enemies of annexation, used as a means of placing the responsibility for the war upon President Polk, and all that he represented in that brilliant epoch of American history. Once concede the fact that the country between the Nueces and the Rio Grande actually belonged to Mexico in 1845 and 1846, and all the odium which the most extreme partisans would cast upon the Southern people generally, and the old Texan in particular, immediately attaches.

If anything in the history of Mexico, Coahuila, Chihuahua, New Mexico, Tamaulipas, and Texas is well established, it is the fact that Texas had no definite, officially defined western boundaries prior to December 19, 1836, when she defined that boundary by act of her Congress. In the discussions of the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States over the compromise measures of 1850, with every known source of information available to the able and learned men who for days and weeks investigated the subject, no fact was brought out which showed that Texas had any well defined permanent boundaries on the west, nor had she any fixed boundaries on the east and north until the treaty of 1819 fixed them. The facts from which H. H. Bancroft, Von Holst, and a large majority of the leading historians of the United States

indulge the presumption that the westward march of General Taylor from the Nueces to the Rio Grande was an invasion of Mexico involves a recapitulation of the history of the western boundary of Texas in so far as the same is accessible. The Constitution of the United States makes it the duty of the President, when there is threatened invasion, to mobilize troops and repel it. As Texas, after July, 1845, was to all intents and purposes, save the perfunctory acts necessary to adjust her governmental machinery to statehood, a State of the United States, President Polk would have been justified not only in ordering General Taylor to the Nueces, but to the Rio Grande and beyond. President Jackson, Lincoln, or Cleveland would have taken such a course at least five months sooner than President Polk did.

As the boundary question has been pushed to the front as a material matter among the causes of the Mexican war, and it has been assumed as a matter of fact that the Rio Grande was not the western boundary of Texas, and that all territory between that river and the Nueces was Mexican territory, a review of the history of the subject may not be out of place. It has received elaborate attention in speeches made in both houses of Congress, in newspapers, magazines and such *pro hac vice* productions as Jay's *Review of the Mexican War*. The discussion takes up several hundred pages of the *Congressional Globe*, and is marked by a research almost without parallel in the parliamentary history of the United States Congress, but in all these one will search in vain for any reference to any law, decree, order, treaty, or other official designation of the Nueces or any other western boundary of Texas. All the learning on the subject is based upon a common repute in sections remote from either river, a common repute by no means general except in so far as geographers made it so by making maps, which themselves were based upon hearsay testimony.

Taking this as a basis for determining whether or not Texas ever had any actual western boundary line prior to 1845, except such as was marked by the sword in the struggle with Mexico, we find—

First. That the Rio Grande was its ancient western boundary before it became a province of Spain, and continued to be the generally regarded boundary line up to the middle of the 18th century.

Second. That since that time the line had been variously

regarded as at the Aransas, the San Antonio, the Medina, and the Nueces.

H. H. Bancroft, who has compiled probably the most elaborate history of Mexico extant, and who may be regarded as standard authority on that subject, when discussing questions free from the polar disturbance of the slavery issue, says, in Vol. I, *History North Mexican States and Texas*, on page 375, "Coahuila, in the 17th century, was the region north of 26° between the Bolson de Mapimi on the west and the Rio del Norte on the east."

Writing of a later period he says (*Ibid.*, p. 604): "Coahuila extended northeast across the Rio Del Norte, to the Medina, which was *generally regarded* as the boundary between that province and Texas."

How, when, or by what authority the boundary line was moved from the Rio Grande to the Medina, he does not state; but, in a note, says: "This boundary is not a satisfactory one. * * * As a matter of fact there were no exact bounds, for none were needed. * * * Why the Medina, rather than the Nueces or Hondo, was generally spoken of as the boundary it is hard to determine."

As Tamaulipas was not organized until after the middle of the 17th century, we have to rely upon the circumstances attending the subjugation of that region and its organization into a province to determine what was regarded as the boundary between that province and Texas.

In this connection it must be remembered that the local affairs of the provinces of Mexico under Spain were under the control of a tripartite government, ecclesiastical, civil, and military, first one and then another, particularly the military and ecclesiastical, performing all the functions of government. Their jurisdictions, functional and territorial, were different, and in speaking generally of divisional lines there is uncertainty as to which is meant, military, civil, or ecclesiastical.

When José de Escandon, a military subaltern at Querétaro, was commissioned to subjugate, settle, and organize the Tamaulipas region, the extent of his operations north confined him to a distance which took him to the Rio Grande. When he reached that point he stopped, but permitted Basterra, one of his captains, to go on to the Nueces. This officer went as far east as the Guadalupe

river to the old mission, La Bahía del Espíritu Santo. He dismantled this mission and re-established it at Santa Dorotea (Goliad), on the San Antonio river. Accompanying his official report was a map, entitled "Colonia de Nuevo Santander,"¹ with that river as the eastern bounds of his province. From this circumstance the San Antonio river was regarded as the boundary, notwithstanding the fact that San Antonio, further up the same river, was and had been the capital of Texas since 1715. This continued to be regarded as the boundary until the Nueces was put down upon the maps as such, it is said, about the year 1805.

In 1833, Texas, which had been attached to Coahuila since 1824, petitioned the Mexican government for separate statehood, and now arose the first occasion for Mexico, as a republic, to officially consider the question.

Santa Anna commissioned Almonte, a man of wide learning, and his trusted adviser, to visit Texas and acquire such information as would enable him to intelligently consider and act upon the petition, and among other things to thoroughly explore and mark out a western boundary line.

The general features of Almonte's report are familiar to the student of Texas history. In the matter of a boundary he said: "Notwithstanding the fact that up to this time it has been believed that the Rio Nueces is the dividing line between Texas and Coahuila,² for it appears so on the maps, I am informed by the government that in this an error has been made by the geographers, and that the true line ought to commence at the mouth of the Aransas and run thence to its source; thence in a direct line to the confluence of the San Antonio with the Medina river, continuing thence up the left bank of the Medina to its source; thence in a straight line to the boundaries of Chihuahua."³

Almonte, in this definition of a boundary, ignores Tamaulipas, has Coahuila extending down to the mouth of the Aransas, makes the Nueces appear as an old boundary between Texas and Coahuila, and leaves more than one-half of the western part of Texas

¹Ban. Hist. Mex.; Prieto Hist. Tamaulipas, p. —

²It was not and never had been. The Nueces was supposed to be the line between Texas and Tamaulipas.

³Documentos para la Historia de Mexico, IV, 22.

without a boundary,—all of which shows that the highest authorities in Mexico were totally ignorant of the actual geography of the country.

The petition of Texas was not granted, and this proposed boundary came to naught. It is cited as an illustration of the character of knowledge the most prominent Mexican officials had so late as 1835.

When the people of Texas determined, in 1835, to rid the country of the presence of the Mexican army, they made the Rio Grande their boundary, it being the most natural, the most convenient, and for nearly one hundred years the most generally recognized western boundary; and from December, 1835, up to the battle of Palo Alto, the evidence is well nigh conclusive that both Mexico and Texas regarded and treated it as the western boundary. In November, 1835, the Texans captured Fort Lipantitlan, the only garrisoned fort between the Nueces and Rio Grande. In December they captured San Antonio and a garrison of 1600 Mexican troops, and paroled them upon the condition, among others, that they leave Texas,—not by going beyond the Nueces, but beyond the Rio Grande. In April, 1836, they captured Santa Anna and the force immediately under him, and stipulated with him that his life (which had been forfeited by the Goliad massacre) should be spared, and the bulk of his army be permitted to retire, unmolested, across the Rio Grande, which in future should be the recognized western boundary of Texas. It is true Santa Anna was a prisoner when he made this agreement, but he obtained for himself and his army every benefit asked, and upon principles of equity its annulment by Mexico was not justified. Its binding force in morals and law was recognized and insisted upon by Filisola, his next in command, who asserted that the army was saved from destruction and a national disgrace avoided by it.

Santa Anna's ideas as to a western boundary may be inferred from an expression in a letter to President Houston, November 5, 1836, in which he referred to it as a matter that had been "pending many years." This period, of course, long antedated the Texas revolution.

After the armistice between Texas and Mexico, in June, 1844, General Woll, in command of the frontier forces of Mexico, issued his proclamation from beyond the Rio Grande, denouncing as

"traitors all who should be found at the distance of four leagues from the left bank," not of the Nueces, but "of the Rio Grande,"¹ clearly indicating his idea as to where the boundary was.

In February, 1847, Santa Anna, in writing to his government concerning a peace messenger that had been sent to him by General Taylor, said, "I observed we could say nothing of peace while the Americans were on this side of the Bravo," showing that he still thought the Americans would be in their proper place anywhere east of the Rio Grande.

The matter can hardly be better stated than it was by the Mexican peace commissioners, who said, "The intention of making the Bravo a limit has been announced in the clearest terms for the last twelve years. * * * After the battle of San Jacinto, in 1836, that was the territory we stipulated to evacuate, and which we accordingly did evacuate by falling back on Matamoras. In this place was stationed what was called the army of the north; and though it is true that expeditions and incursions were made upon them, even as far as Bejar, we have very soon evacuated, leaving the intervening space absolutely free, and General Taylor found it so when he entered there by order of his government"—an admission that if the Nueces had ever been a boundary, it had been changed to the Rio Grande by the Texans, long before General Taylor entered.

Mr. Von Holst, who professes to have visited Texas, characterizes this strip as a desert one hundred and sixty miles wide by about one hundred and twenty long, and he says that being a desert it was the suitable and proper boundary; but Mr. Bancroft, on the other hand, considers it land suitable for slave labor. The slave population, in 1860 in this area, outside of Corpus Christi, was ninety-nine, and the assessed valuation for 1899 over \$22,000,000, while its real value will approximate \$50,000,000, a sum considerably in excess of the assessed values of the entire State of Texas in 1846.

Much stress has been laid upon actual occupancy as necessary to title, as well as upon the fact that Texas had never exercised actual jurisdiction over this strip. It must be remembered that

¹Von Holst says, "Whoever came within a mile of the left border of the Rio Bravo was to be shot." Vol. I, p. 683.

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Texas started on her career as a republic with a population of only about 30,000, and with an area of over 300,000 square miles. If her title had depended upon actual occupancy, thousands of square miles would still be "no man's land," although her population has swelled to 3,000,000. The exercise of jurisdiction is an incident of population. The ability to drive away intruders, and to continuously protect territory from intrusion, was the basis of the claim to the dominion which Texas had over this strip. When General Taylor took possession he did so by permission of Texas. Mexico had never driven an intruder from it since 1836, whereas Texas had driven the Mexicans from it, in November and December, 1835, in 1836, in March, 1842, in September, 1842, and in 1845 her constructive possession was as complete as it was to over 200,000 square miles of other territory, conceded by all to belong to Texas proper.

Von Holst says¹ that Texas admitted that she had no title west of the Nueces by making an alliance with the leaders of the movement for the Republic of the Rio Grande. In this he has been misinformed. President Lamar not only refused² to enter into any such alliance, but ordered³ the forces that had gathered on the west bank of the Nueces to disperse.

Time and space will not allow a notice of the many errors in fact, and still more in conclusion, that now pass current as the history of annexation and the Mexican war. When they are sifted out and weighed, it will clearly appear that the origin, growth, and development of Texas into a republic and her subsequent annexation to the United States was neither a Northern nor a Southern, but a purely Western movement, neither long retarded by the abolitionist nor hastened by the slaveholder, nor seriously affected by the political storms of the East; but a movement having its inspiration in the minds of a class which before the beginning of the last century crossed the Alleghanies and gave to civilization the fertile valley of the Mississippi. It will be seen that its motive power was neither sectional nor political in the partisan sense of

¹Vol. II, p. 86.

²Brown, *Hist. Tex.*, Vol. II, p. 173.

³Thrall, *Hist. Tex.*, p. 307.

that term, and that it was neither unlawful nor immoral. Had it been political aggrandizement, Texas would long since have had in the Senate of the United States ten instead of two representatives, with a corresponding increase of power in the electoral college. It was not a move in the interests of slavery, as annexation affected that institution neither one way nor the other. Texas had the option in 1845 of remaining a separate republic, with slavery, and guarantees from the two most powerful nations of the earth, or of casting her lot with the United States. She chose the latter in the face of the dangers that then threatened that institution.

The immediate cause of the Mexican war was not a matter of boundary, for no such question was in dispute between Texas and Mexico, such a thing being the subsequent outgrowth of partisan invention. Between the United States and Mexico the expressed, sole cause was annexation. The conservative elements in Mexico were powerless before the tornado of public sentiment that swept her on into a desolating war.

When the final verdict of history is reached, and the partisan excrescences that now disfigure its pages are pruned away, that period, instead of being one of the darkest, will become one of the brightest beacons that light the path of the Anglo-American, and the memories of Houston, Jackson, Calhoun, and Polk, and the rest of that illustrious band of statesmen that added Texas to the galaxy of States, will be cherished by all true Americans; while the Texas pioneer will stand *facile princeps* in the van of the movement that has conquered a continent and given to mankind the greatest, the best, the freest, and the most just government on earth.